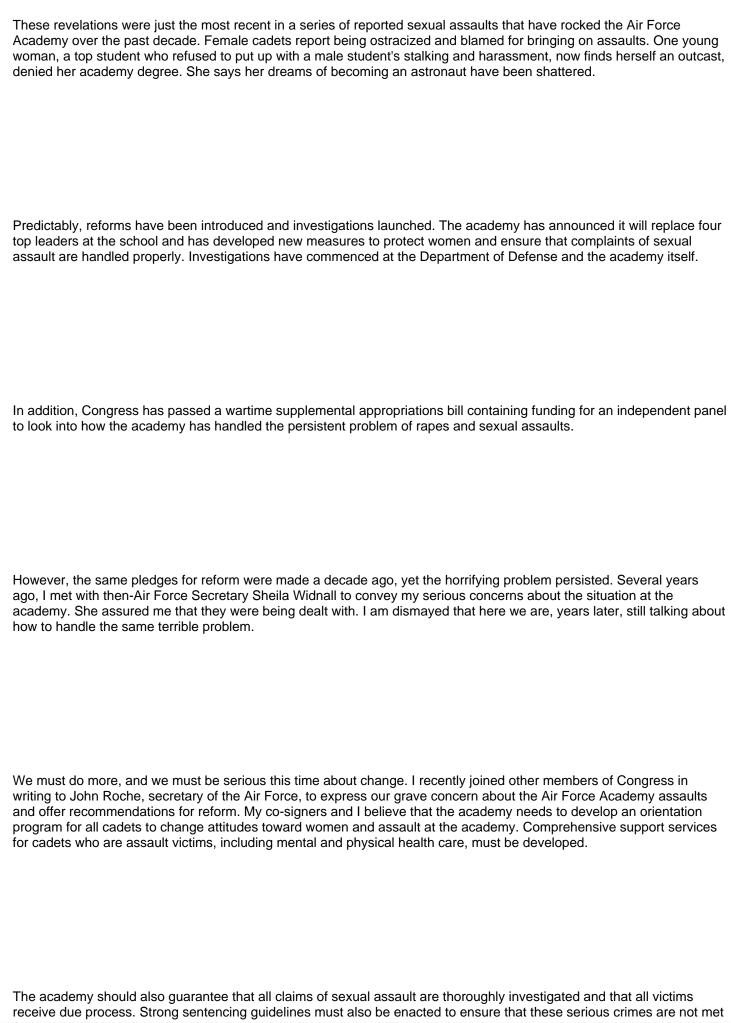
U.S. must protect Air Force women- April 28, 2003

U.S. must protect Air Force women
By Rep. Louise Slaughter
Published in the Democrat and Chronicle, April 28, 2003
Across the nation, victims and activists recognize April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. It is highly unfortunate that one of the most recent, high-profile stories of sexual violence comes from an institution that trained many of our men and women serving overseas: the Air Force Academy.
The government promotes policies to protect women from abuse, yet this government institution has ignored a culture of violence against women for years. It is time for serious change.
Earlier this year, the Air Force Academy revealed that 56 women reported being sexually assaulted or raped there since 1993. Officials acknowledge that the actual number of cases is likely much higher because the climate of harassment and intimidation at the academy keeps so many women from reporting crimes committed against them. A January 2003 survey showed that an alarmingly high percentage of female cadets reported having no faith in the academy's ability to protect them.

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with weak, short sentences, as has happened in the past.
The military has contended for years that women should not be in combat because it is too dangerous. Who would have thought the threat to women in the military begins before they even reach the battlefield?
That this culture of harassment and violation at the Air Force Academy has continued despite its continued public exposure over the past decade is a national disgrace. Congress will be vigilant in ensuring that the proposed reforms are instituted quickly - and successfully. How dare we ask these young women to risk their lives to defend our nation overseas, then fail miserably to defend their safety and dignity at home. Our brave women in uniform deserve much better.

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